

The South Danvers Observer

The Peabody London Trust

The South Danvers Observer is published quarterly.

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Peabody Square, Spitalfields, London, 1864

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—The year 1862 began with an historic New Years' Day storm, one so severe that Fitch Poole was unable to print or deliver that week's issue of *The South Danvers Wizard*. Any who were superstitious might have said the storm was a harbinger of coming events. Those who lived through those tumultuous times would have been hard pressed to disagree.

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After all, the war was just under 9 months old. While fervor for the Union cause burned especially bright in South Danvers, the heavy realization was settling into most people's hearts that the war would not end as quickly as first hoped. If things weren't bad enough, the recent capture of Confederate agents off the British ship *Trent* raised the terrifying possibility of Britain declaring war on the U.S. The Union could not afford for this to happen.

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And so, after some negotiations, the Confederate prisoners were released from Fort Warren, located on Georges Island in Boston Harbor, during the New Years Day storm and eventually sailed back to England. But

feelings between the United States and England remained as frigid as the New England winter.

Publication of the *South Danvers Wizard* resumed on January 8th. The news continued to be dominated by the war. This first issue of 1862 contained a tiny seven line article, announcing the death of one Albert Saxe-Coburg. Mr. Saxe-Coburg was said to have left behind a widow with nine children. While it is possible that the tensions between America and England caused the editor of the *Wizard* to gloss over such a significant death, it is more likely that most people realized that Albert Saxe-Coburg was Queen Victoria's husband.

The remainder of January's articles alternated between the war and local news. Winter temperatures allowed people to enjoy indoor games and to take what pleasure they could in sleighing and ice skating with friends.

The *South Danvers Wizard* issued on Wednesday, February 5th, 1862, began as always. The front page printed a poem describing the strength of Massachusetts soldiers, followed by an account of the Massachusetts 8th Regiment. On the second page were letters

from South Danvers soldiers serving in the war, as well as another article about the Trent Affair. The Confederate agents might have left the month before, but anger between Britain and the U.S. lingered on.

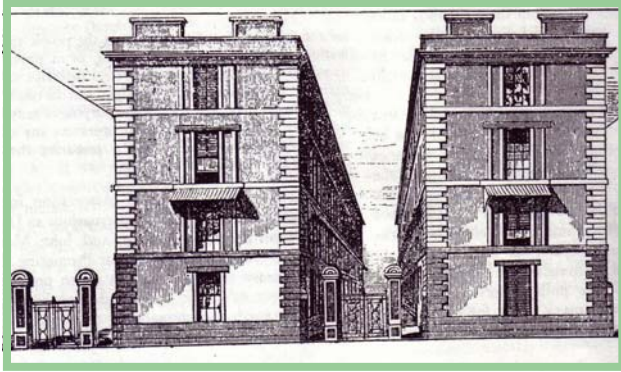
And then, in one of the earliest published announcements, came the news that George Peabody would donate an undisclosed amount for the creation of housing for the poor of London.

Mr. Peabody's generosity had already been established. But it is doubtful that any of his other gifts did more to help the poor or, just as significant, to ease tensions between the two hostile nations.

"... Mr. Peabody contemplates giving a round sum of money for the permanent relief of the poor and destitute inhabitants of London. . . its effect will be soothing to the English mind, after being wrought up to such a pitch of anger by the late occurrences which have disturbed the equanimity of both nations."

From the Feb. 5, 1862
South Danvers Wizard

George Peabody's Donation



First Model Homes
Designed by C. E. Lang and
built by the Birkenhead Dock Company in 1847
Image from [The Five Per Cent Philanthropy](#) by Tarn

—When George Peabody announced his historic decision to donate £150,000 (equivalent to \$750,000) to create homes for the poor of London, the announcement couldn't have come a better time for both Britain and the United States. With the recent *Trent Affair* leaving few people in England viewing America in a positive light, this one act by an American, and by someone so respected in England and Europe, helped heal the rift between the two countries.

Having lived in London for over two decades, Peabody had seen the ever increasing poverty afflicting the city. And while few realized it, Peabody understood poverty. It was because of his family's poverty that he could only attend school for 4 years. It was because of poverty that he was forced to abandon his formal education at the age of 11 to accept an apprenticeship in the store of Sylvester Proctor. And it may have been because of his own memories of what that poverty had cost him at such a young age, that he now focused his efforts on ways to provide education and help for those who most needed it.

Peabody was not the first person to address the need for public housing in London. Others had made attempts to provide homes for the poor. The movement to raise social awareness of the need for public housing began in London during the 1840s, spearheaded by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury spent all his adult life endeavoring to end dangerous working conditions for children. His eventual goal was to enact laws to prevent all child labor. He was also behind many efforts to refurbish the notoriously horrific rooming houses where most poor people were sheltered.

Prince Albert, too, supported these efforts and designed model homes for the poor which were exhibited at the World Exhibition in 1851. But with the first worldwide economic crisis occurring in the Panic of 1857, interest in public housing began to wane.

George Peabody had first considered making a donation to London not long after he gave the funds to



Model Homes designed by Prince Albert for the World
Exhibition in 1851
Image from [The Five Per Cent Philanthropy](#) by Tarn

create the first Peabody Institute here in his hometown. At first, he thought to provide a public water fountain, thinking that much sickness could be eliminated if only the poor had access to clean water. And because he viewed education as a critical key to future success, he also thought to make a significant donation to the Ragged Schools Union, with the intent to expand this effort to provide education and training to the poorest of children.

Before making his decision, though, Peabody spoke with friends and colleagues regarding his desire. Among those he consulted was Bishop Charles McIlvaine from Ohio, who was visiting London in the late 1850s. Before offering his counsel, McIlvaine wrote to the most logical source for philanthropic endeavors in England, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. In addition to all his other works to aid the poor, Shaftesbury was also the head of the Ragged schools Union. It was Shaftesbury who informed McIlvaine that if Peabody wished to ease the plight of the poor, their greatest need, the one thing that would make the most difference in their daily lives, was decent housing.

And thus, the Peabody Trust was formed.



Attic Room in Boarding House
Image from Wikimedia Commons

George Peabody's Connection to the Trent Affair

—When the Civil War began, both the Union and the Confederacy expected a quick end. Both sides saw their cause as just. And both sides believed in the strength of their army. With the early victories buoying the Confederates, the South sought allies for support, hoping for a speedy end to the war. Not long after the war began, they sent their first agents to England to plead for help. Months later, the Confederacy arranged for James Mason to head to England and John Slidell to seek help from France. These agents slipped through the Union blockade to Havana where they then took passage on the British Steamship *Trent*. Among the party was John Slidell's secretary, George Eustis.

George Eustis' wife was Louise Morris Corcoran, the daughter of William Wilson Corcoran, a close friend of George Peabody. Louise Corcoran Eustis was a favorite of Peabody. He affectionately nicknamed her, Loula. George and Loula's regard for Peabody was so great that one of their sons, George Peabody Eustis, was named in honor of their friend.

On November 8, 1861, Captain Charles Wilkes of the U.S.S. *San Jacinto* ordered his men to fire a shot across the bow of the *Trent* and called for the ship to stop. The *Trent* was boarded and the Confederate agents and their party were removed. England was outraged that the Union Navy had intercepted one of its ships. Americans on the other hand were delighted with Wilkes and pronounced him a hero for the Union cause. Mason, Slidell, Eustis and the rest of the Confederate party were brought to Boston to be imprisoned in Fort Warren, located in Boston Harbor.

For seven weeks it seemed that Britain not only would recognize the Confederacy but would also declare war on the Union. Britain reinforced its defenses in Canada and began preparations to invade Maine. Wild rumors circulated in London and in the U.S. It was said that Marguerite Slidell, the daughter of the Confederate agent, had been threatened during the arrest and she retaliated by slapping one of the American officers. The story grew and grew until one British newspaper claimed that its source for the tale was "George Peabody, the well-known banker and merchant." Peabody was blamed for betraying Miss Slidell's confidence, which George Peabody denied.

In the midst of all these rumors and speculations on either side of the Atlantic, both governments were attempting to deal with the threat of another war. Because the first Transatlantic Cable that had been laid



Marguerite Slidell reportedly slapping the offending American officer

Image from Wikimedia Commons

across the Atlantic had snapped in 1858, communications between the U.S. and England took 7 to 10 days. England drafted a message, ordering the U.S. government to release the prisoners or war would be declared. Lord Lyons, the British ambassador to the U.S. delayed England's response. Between his efforts and the resulting delay due to the broken Atlantic cable, the Americans didn't receive England's ultimatum until December 23rd. By then, tempers in the U.S. had cooled. The Union government realized they could not afford another war. In the end, Lord Lyons and the broken Atlantic cable helped prevent war. If things had transpired more swiftly, it is possible events might have gone the other way.

And so, on December 31st, the U.S. ordered the prisoners released. They set sail for England on January 1st, just as a blizzard descended on the Northeast.

While Peabody's decision as to just what kind of gift he intended for London had been settled, he delayed making the announcement of his donation until the hostility between Britain and America eased. While his gift didn't completely shift British opinion of the U.S., it helped make great strides in that direction. And eventually paved the way for the two nations to become the allies they are today.

"How are we to remain at peace if the British press indicates at all the feelings of the people of Great Britain? Not only their newspapers, but their higher periodicals, now that the Trent affair is settled, still predict war and are preparing the minds of the people for it. We have spoken before of the savage article in Blackwood. . . In that magazine. . . it assumes that war will take place and under the 'Defence of Canada' it thus speaks, 'There are two modes of carrying on war with America—one aggressive, the other defensive. We shall probably adopt both. We shall assail their harbors, burn their fleets, destroy their commerce, and keep their whole seaboard in constant alarm.'"

From the February 12, 1862 *South Danvers Wizard*

Pictorial History of the First Peabody London Trust Homes



Spitalfields, 1864.
The first of the Peabody Trust Buildings

Peabody Square, Islington, 1865
The second Peabody Trust Homes to open



Peabody Square, Blackfriars. Opened in 1866,



Peabody Square, Westminster.
Opened 1871

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